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THE ADVENT SEASON.

Devotional Readings

FROM

BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR'S
LIFE OF CHRIST.

SELECTED AND ADAPTED FOR THE CLOSET, OR
THE FAMILY, OR THE CONGREGATION.

BY

JOHN EDWARD KEMPE, M.A.,

PREBENDARY OF S. PAUL'S,

AND CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO THE QUEEN.

"Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

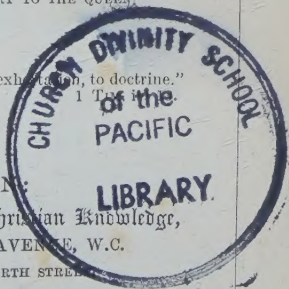
1 Tim. iv.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

I RESPECTFULLY ask reviewers and other critical readers to judge this manual with primary and just reference to its purposes as they are specified in the title page.

It is not intended for a recommendation of "The Great Exemplar" by means of samples or specimens of its excellence—a sort of Elegant Extracts from one of the most remarkable writings of "the Shakespeare of English prose"*—but it is such a gathering

* "No language can be too warm for that wealth and beauty of style which constitutes

from that store of rich material as might be made suitable to the tastes, the feelings, and the capacities of the great majority of likely hearers.

Thus much, however, I may say to account for the free handling to which I have had much more recourse in the following pages than I had in those of the "Readings for the Holy Week" which have preceded them. In the use of this latter the reader-aloud has, as I have learned, found it necessary to extemporise variations and additions beyond those upon which I had ventured in the book which was read from. I have endeavoured to render such interruptions needless, but it has been, I fear, much at the literary cost of my perhaps his chief claim to our admiration and which a living writer has compared to a deeply murmuring sea with the sunlight on it."—Dean Farrar on Jeremy Taylor in "Masters in English Theology."

matchless original. Nevertheless, I am left in doubt whether admiration and reverence may not have withheld me from going far enough in that way to promote that edification in the devout life which should always be the paramount consideration in preparing manuals of the present kind.

Since I had nearly completed this second course of Readings, my attention has been directed to an admirable book, which in 1880 had reached its eighth edition, without (I am ashamed to say) my being aware of its existence. The plan of my manuals has so much resemblance to that of Miss Sewell's "Readings for every day in Lent," that, but for my ignorance, I should not have risked the imputation of building upon another's foundation. Miss Sewell's, however, compose a volume of 366 pages,

which are larger than mine in size and printed in much smaller type, so that there can be no question of conflict or competition between the two compilers from Taylor. I, for my part, shall be quite contented if my selections are accepted as devotional companions to the homilies of the able and excellent lady, which, while more literary and didactic as well as vastly more extensive than either series of mine, are certainly not less calculated to aid a devout life, though it may be in a different way from mine, and amongst a smaller class of seekers after Christ.

It would not have been possible to adapt this manual to daily use without enlarging it too much, not to speak of the difficulty arising from the yearly variation in the number of days in the Advent season. As provision for

the length of this period, I could not collect from "The Great Exemplar" (as I should have preferred to do) nearly as much eligible matter as was wanted. For two Readings—those on "Christ's Advent to Judgment"—I have had recourse to Taylor's Advent Sermons on that subject, toning down, as much as I dared, their awful severity by overcoming the temptations to draw upon its finest passages; and I have ventured to add a supplementary four by condensations of as many sermons of my own.

To those who prefer the system and order of a calendar, I would suggest that the twelve readings herein contained may be used each on one weekday of the first fortnight in Advent, and that for the remaining days, which will vary annually in their number but can never exceed twelve, selections for

repetition may be made at the reader's discretion, to which it may also be left to determine, for the whole course, in what order the several Readings, or their distinct portions shall be taken. Let me only avail myself of the eloquent words of a dear friend,* long since taken to his rest, to express my earnest hope and prayer that all who so read will "carry along with them the assurance that they have" (in Taylor's portion of this book) "the work of no mere theorist or visionary or professional advocate, retailing the wisdom of others, offering to them armour which he has never proved himself, but substantially that of one who, having been lifted up for a short time into great prosperity, was plunged into

* The late W. G. Humphry, Vicar of S. Martin's-in-the-Fields, in "Companions for the Devout Life."

adversity and visited with sorrow upon sorrow, of one who, if we could have known him as a friend, would have taught us even better things in his life than he tells us in his writings."

J. E. K.

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THE ADVENT SEASON.

THE FIRST ADVENT.

The Word made Flesh.

THAT which shines brightest presents itself first to the eye ; and the devout soul, in the chain of excellent and precious things which are represented in the counsel, design, and first beginnings of the work of our redemption, hath not leisure to attend the twinkling of the lesser stars till it hath stood and admired the glory and eminence of the Divine love manifested in the Incarnation of the Word eternal. Out of mere and perfect charity and compassion for us, God sent into the world His only Son for remedy to our miseries, to enoble our nature by an union with

Divinity, to sanctify it with His justice, to enrich it with His grace, to instruct it with His doctrine, to guide it with His example, to rescue it from servitude, to assert it into the liberty of the sons of God, and at last to make it partaker of a beatific resurrection.

God, Who in the infinite treasures of His wisdom and providence could have chosen many other ways for our redemption than the incarnation of His eternal Son, was pleased to choose this, not only that the remedy by man might have proportion to the causes of our ruin, of which man was the author ; but also that we might the more freely receive the influences of a Saviour with Whom we communicate in nature. If He had made the remedy of human nature to come all the way clothed in prodigy, and the whole course of its execution had been like the terrors of Mount Sinai, it had not been so useful and complying to human necessities as

was the descent of God to the taking upon Him of human nature. In all works of healing the cure is best wrought by those means which are the least out of harmony to our tempers, and are the most in accord with our constitution ; wherefore the Saviour of the world became human, alluring, full of invitation and the sweetness of love, exemplary, humble and medicinal.

And if we consider the reasonableness of the case, what can be given more sufficient for man's redemption than the sacrifice of the Son of God ? And what can more ennoble our nature than that by the means of His holy humanity it was taken up into the cabinet of the mysterious Trinity ? What better advocate could we have than He that is appointed to be our Judge ? And what greater hope of reconciliation can be imagined, than that God, in Whose power it is to bestow an absolute pardon, hath taken

a new nature, accepted an office, and undergone a life of toil and lowliness, with the purpose of procuring our pardon? For now, though as the righteous Judge He will judge the nations righteously, yet by the taking our nature and bearing its sins, He became a party in the penalty, and having so made Himself liable as man, as He is God He will satisfy. If He had not been God He could not have given infinite merit to the actions and sufferings of His humanity; and if He had not been man we should have wanted the imitability of His example, and the gracious influence of His sympathy.

Jesus was pleased to be born of a poor mother, in a poor place, in a cold winter's night, far from home, amongst strangers, with all the circumstances of humility and poverty. And since the eternal Wisdom, Who knew to choose the good and refuse the evil, did choose a life of poverty, it gives us demonstration

that riches and honour, those idols of the world's esteem, are so far from creating true blessedness, that they are not in themselves entitled to be sought and worshipped at all. Neither is any man to be ashamed or impatient of innocent poverty, of which the holy Jesus made election, and His apostles after Him made public profession, and to which many like men since have made and avowed their life-long devotion.

The condition of the Person who was so born is here of the greatest consideration. For He that cried in the manger, that sucked the breast of a woman, that hath exposed Himself to poverty and a world of troubles is "the Son of the living God," of the same substance with His Father, begotten before all ages, before the morning stars ; He is God eternal.

He is also, by reason of the personal union of the Divinity with His human nature, "the Son of God ;" not by

adoption, as good men and holy angels are, but by an extraordinary and miraculous generation. He is "the heir" of His Father's glories and possessions, not by succession (for His Father cannot die), but by an equality of communication. He is the "express image of His Father's person" according to both natures; the miracle and greatness of His Godhead being, as upon wax, imprinted upon all the capacities of His humanity. And after all this He is our Saviour, that to our duties of wonder and adoration we may add the affections of love and union.

— *alcedon.* Here then are concentrated the prodigies of greatness and goodness, of wisdom and charity, of meekness and humility, marching all the way in mystery and incomprehensible mingling; for we have to consider Him at once in the bosom of His Father, where He is seated by love and in essential happiness, and in the manger, where love also placed

Him, with an infinite desire to communicate His happiness to us. As He is God His throne is in the heaven, and He fills all things ; as He is man He is contained within an uneasy cradle, and cries in a stable ; as God clothed in a robe of glory, at the same instant when you may behold and wonder at His humanity wrapped in cheap and unworthy swaddling clothes. As God He is circled with millions of angels ; as man in the company of cattle. As God He is the eternal Word of the Father, self-sustained, all-sufficient, and without need ; and yet He has submitted Himself to a condition imperfect, inglorious, indigent, and necessitous. And this consideration is apt and natural to produce great affections of love, duty, and obedience, desires of union and conformity to His sacred person, life, actions, and laws ; that we rest all our resolutions, and finally determine all our reason, and

our passions and capacities upon that saying of S. Paul, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. Maran-atha" — "Maran-atha," the Lord cometh.

His body was but His soul's upper garment, of the same nature and substance with ours, but personally united to the Divinity, and by this union as it is itself exalted far above all orders of intelligences, so we also have been brought into alliance with God, teaching us not to separate ourselves from Him by unworthy living. Here we may meditate that His memory is boundless and unalterable, ever remembering to do us good and to present our needs to God by His holy intercession; that His understanding is without ignorance, knowing the secrets of our hearts, full of mysterious secrets of His Father's kingdom in which "all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God are hidden;" that His Will is faultless,

exercised with an uninterrupted act of love to God, full of love to us, of humility in itself, of conformity to God, wholly resigned by acts of adoration and obedience, for it is human still. Zeal of the honour of God and compunction for our sins ; pity of our miseries and hatred of our impieties ; desires of satisfying the justice of God, and great joy at the consideration of all the fruits of His nativity, the appeasing of His Father, the redemption of His brethren—upon these, as upon so many wings, He mounted up to the throne of glory, carrying our nature with Him, above the seats of angels.

These considerations may present themselves to any that with piety and devotion behold the Holy Babe lying in the obscure and humble place of His nativity.

The Prayer.

HOLY and eternal Jesus, we adore and

worship Thee with the lowest prostrations of soul and body, and give Thee thanks for that great love to us, whereof Thy nativity hath afforded proof. We present to Thy holy humanity, dwelling in the adorable Divinity, our whole self, humbly desiring that as Thou didst clothe Thyself with a human body, Thou mayest invest us with the robes of righteousness, covering our sins, enabling our weaknesses and sustaining our mortality. Vouchsafe to come to us by an intimate and spiritual nearness, that so Thou mayest lead us to Thy Father. Take us by the hand, place us in Thy heart, that there we may live and there we may die. As Thou hast united our nature to Thine own eternal being, mayest Thou also unite our person to Thine by the inward bonds of love and obedience and conformity. Now that Thou hast made even our bodies precious, teach us so reverently to account of them that we

may not dare to profane them by sinful lusts and appetites, or in any way unhallow the ground where Thy holy feet have left their marks to lead us. So living here with Thee in the fellowship of a holy life, may we die with Thee by self-denial and unwearied patience, and reign with Thee in immortal glories, world without end. Amen.

The Virgin Mother.

[HAVING first “stood and admired the glory and eminence of the Divine love manifested in the incarnation of the Son of God,” we may now “attend the twinkling of a lesser,” but still heavenly and glorious star, in her, the holy maid called Mary, upon whom God poured a full measure of honour in choosing her for the mother of the Messias. In contemplating her, while we must be careful not to be wise in our own conceit, and above that which is written, we cannot be wrong in deriving from the Word of Truth every fair and reasonable conclusion as to her capacity and disposition to receive the greatest honour that ever was done to the daughters of men. The angel came to

her and said, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee ; blessed art thou among women." What is there of human excellence, which may not fitly, provided it be not merely fancifully, be gathered from that greeting of God's angelic messenger ?]

When the blessed Virgin was so informed that two glories, like the two luminaries in heaven, should so meet in her that she might become the mother of her Lord in such a way as to be His servant also, then all her desires must have received such satisfaction as to fill to the full all the corners of her heart. But she, to whom the greatest things of religion and the transports of devotion were doubtless made familiar by the constancy and piety of her daily practices, however full she was of joy, yet received the announcement with the gentleness and tranquillity fitted for the entertainment

of the spirit of love, and with a quietness symbolical of "that holy thing which should be born of her"—the Lamb of God; for she meekly replied, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word: and the angel departed from her," for she needed not his ministry of more assurance.*

Till now, human nature was less than that of angels; but by the incarnation of the Word was to be exalted above them: yet the archangel Gabriel, being despatched in embassy to represent the joy and exaltation of his inferior, had instantly hastened with this message to the humble virgin. And if we would reduce our prayers to actions and do God's will on earth, as the angels in heaven do it, we should promptly execute every part of the Divine will, though it were to be instrumental to the exaltation of a brother above ourselves.

* Heb. i. 14.

So when the eternal God meant to stoop so low as to be fixed to our centre, He chose for His mother a holy person and a maid, but yet affianced to a just man, that He might not only be secure in the innocency, but also provided for in the reputation of His holy mother; teaching us that we must not only satisfy ourselves in the purity of our purposes and hearty innocence, but must "provide also things honest in the sight of all men," being free from the suspicions and semblances of evil; so making provision for private innocence and public honesty.

There are some curiosities so bold and determined as to tell of the very room in which Mary received the announcement, and the very way in which she was engaged there. She was confined, they suppose, to an intimate retirement, and was in her oratory private and devout. The very matter

of her prayer too is conjectured. It was for the salvation of all the world, and the revelation of the Messias, desiring she might be so happy as, not indeed to be His mother but, to kiss the feet of her who should have the glory of becoming His mother; it being said that some pious women, expecting to become mothers, made it an object of their prayers that Christ might be born of them.

We have no security of these particulars; but there is no piety so diffident as to require a sign to encourage the belief that Mary's employment on the instant was holy and religious, and that in that disposition she received a grace which the greatest queens would have bought cheaply with their robes and diadems. Presuming it to have been so, it consigns an excellent pattern to women that they accustom themselves to those retirements where none but God and His angels will find

them and have admittance. For the holy Jesus can come to them too, and dwell with them, hallowing their souls, and consigning their bodies to a participation of His glories. To gather in our scattered thoughts, and call them away from their outward wanderings, and to withdraw ourselves from a too free conversation with the world, is the best way to dispose any of us to the receiving of a heavenly visitation.

The holy Virgin, when she saw an angel and heard a testimony from Heaven of her grace and piety, was troubled within herself at her salutation, and the manner of it: for she had learned that the fulness of Divine comforts and prosperous successes should not exempt us from fear, but make us the more prudent and wary lest it entangle us in a vanity of spirit. God orders it that our spirits should be affected with dispositions in some

degree contrary to outward events, that so we be fearful in the abundance of prosperous things, and cheerful in adversity, as knowing that this latter may produce benefit and advantage, while the changes to which the former is subject are sometimes full of mischief, and always of danger.

S. Paul travelled over the world, and by a stirring life of action and endurance obtained the crown of an excellent religion and devotion; but the holy Virgin, although she was engaged sometimes in an active life, and in the exercise of an ordinary and small economy in the management and ministries of a family, yet arrived at her perfection by the means of a quiet and silent piety, the internal action of love, devotion, and contemplation. And this following is what we may learn from her example.

Not only those who have opportunities and powers of a conspicuous

godliness, or a distinguished charity, or a powerful converting of souls, or assiduous and effectual preachings, or great demonstrations of merciful works, shall have the greatest crowns, or additional rewards; but the silent affections, the splendour of an internal devotion, the unions of love, humility, and obedience, shall give place to nought else in winning the Divine approval. The daily offices of prayer and praise sung in one's closet, the acts of faith and fear, of patience and meekness, of hope and reverence, repentance and charity, and those graces which walk in a veil and silence, make great ascents to Heaven, and as sure progress to favour and a crown, as the conspicuous and laborious exercises of a more demonstrative religion. There may indeed be great display of religiousness in which there is no religion.

No man needs to complain of want

of power or opportunities for religious improvement, and even such perfection as Christ bids His servants to attain. A devout woman in her closet, praying with zeal and affection for the conversion of souls is in the same order to a "shining like the stars in glory," as he who by eloquent discourses puts that work into a more forward disposition to be actually performed. Many times God is present in the still voice and private retirements of a quiet religion, and the constant spiritualities of an ordinary life, when the loud and impetuous winds, and the shining fires of more laborious and expensive actions are profitable to others only, like a tree of balsam that distils much precious liquor, but none of it for its own use.

The Prayer.

O ETERNAL and almighty Lord God,
Who didst send Thy holy angel with

Thy message to the blessed Virgin, mother of our Lord, to manifest the fulfilment of Thine eternal purpose of the redemption of mankind by the incarnation of Thine eternal Son; put us, by the help of Thy Divine grace, into such holy dispositions that we may never hinder the effects and the event-of those mercies which in our baptism Thou didst design for us. Give us a promptness to obey Thee to the degree and after the likeness of angelical obedience. Give us holy purity and piety, prudence and modesty, like those excellencies which Thou didst create, by Thy Spirit, on the ever blessed Virgin, the mother if God. Grant that our employments be always righteous, undefiled by worldly affections, and as much as our conditions of life will admit, free from worldly interests and disturbances. Grant that we may converse in spirit with Thy angels, entertain the holy

Jesus, conceive Him in our soul, nourish Him with our innocent and holy affections, and bring Him forth and publish Him in lives of piety and obedience.* So may He dwell in us for ever, and we for ever dwell with Him in the house of eternal happiness and glories, world without end. Amen.

* See Gal. iv. 19.

The Shepherds of Bethlehem.

ALTHOUGH the birth of Christ was destitute of the usual circumstances which used to signify and distinguish the birth of princes, yet His first humility was made glorious with manifestations from Heaven which did not only, like the furniture of a princely bedchamber, speak the riches of the parent or the greatness of the son within its own walls, but did declare to all the world that their Prince was born, publishing it with figures and displays not unworthy of its empire.

For when the eastern peoples were expecting that in Judæa should be born their prince, and peace was reigning everywhere by reason of Roman victories, He that was born in Bethlehem was

none other than the promised Prince of Peace. He came to reconcile God with man, and man with his brother, and to make, by the sweetness of His example and the influence of His holy doctrine, such happy atonements between disagreeing natures that, as in a figure, "the wolf and the lamb should lie down together, and a little child," boldly and without danger, "put his finger in the nest and cavern of an asp." The temple at Rome kept open during war, but now under a twelve years close, seemed to declare by so great and good a symbol, not only the greatness, but the goodness of the Prince that was then born in Judæa, the Heir of all the world.

But because the heavens as well as the earth are His creatures and do serve Him, at His birth He received a sign from Heaven above, as well as in the earth beneath, as an homage paid to their common Lord.

As certain shepherds were "keeping watch over their flocks by night, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them." Needs must the shepherds be affrighted by such an appearance, but the angel said unto them, "Fear not, for behold I bring unto you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." The shepherds needed not to be invited—they would be ready enough—to go see this glorious sight; but lest their fancy should rise up to an expectation of a prince as externally glorious as might be hoped for from so glorious an apparition, the angel, to prevent the mistake told them of a sign. The sign indeed, was no other than the thing signified, but yet it was therefore a sign because it was so remote from the common probability and expectation of such a birth.

But as light, when it first begins to gild the east, scatters indeed the darkness from the earth, but ceases not to increase itself till it hath made perfect day, so we may imagine that it happened now in this appearance of the angel of light. He appeared and told his message and did shine, but the light, it may be, shone higher and higher, till midnight was as bright as mid-day. For "suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host;" and after the one had told his message in plain song, the whole chorus broke out in chant, and sang a hymn to the tune and sense of heaven, where glory is paid to God in untiring offices, and whence goodwill descends upon man in perpetual and never-ceasing flow. Their song was, "Glory be to God on high, on earth peace, goodwill towards men." By this song they may have referred not only to the strange peace which at

that time put all the world at ease, but to the great peace which this new-born Prince should make between His Father and all mankind.

As soon as these blessed choristers had sung their Christmas carol, and taught the Church a hymn to be put into her offices for ever, "the angels returned into Heaven," and the shepherds went to Bethlehem to see this thing which the Lord had made known unto them ; and "they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger." Just as the angel had led them to expect, they found his story verified, and saw the glory and the mystery of it, beholding God through the veil of a child's flesh, the Heir of Heaven wrapt in swaddling clothes, and a Person to Whom the angels did minister laid in a manger—they beheld, and wondered and worshipped.

But as precious liquor, warmed and

heightened by a flame, first crowns the vessel and then dances over its brim into the fire, so it happened to the shepherds. Their hearts being filled with the oil of gladness up to the brim, the joy ran over, as being too great to be confined to their own breasts; for "when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child; and"—as well they might—"all that heard it wondered." And the shepherds, having seen what the angels did, upon the publication of the news which less concerned them than us, had learnt it their duty to sing honour to God for the nativity of Christ, for they returned, "glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told to them."

Thus was the message brought to and received by persons simple, and mean, and humble; persons likely to

be more affected by the mystery of the poverty of the Messias than by its worldly scandal: for persons whose habits and feelings dwell in pomps and vanities, and who are not used by charity and humility to “condescend to men of low estate”—brethren of equal natures, though of unequal fortunes with themselves—are of all the world the least likely to understand and be attracted by spiritual excellencies. God Himself in poverty comes in a prejudice to them that love riches, and simplicity is folly to mere worldly wisdom; a mean birth is an ignoble stain, beggary a disgrace, and the cross a thing to shrink from, though it be another’s and not one’s own. The angel’s moral in inviting the poor shepherds to Bethlehem is that none are so fit to come to Christ as those who are poor in spirit, no slaves of the world, simple in their hearts, without guile and designs of advancement:

and therefore did the angel tell his story neither to Herod, nor to the Scribes and Pharisees, who had aims and objects contradictory to the simplicity and poverty of the birth of Jesus.

These shepherds, when they were visited by angels, were "watching over their flocks by night;" no revellers, but in a painful and dangerous employment, securing their folds at their own peril against the incursions of wild beasts. And Christ being the great Shepherd—possibly for the figure's sake the rather manifested to shepherds—hath made His ministers overseers of their flocks, and conveys the mysteries of His kingdom through them to the people committed to their charge.

But besides this symbol, we are taught in the meanings of the letter that they who are diligent, and patient, and fearless in the business of an honest calling are then doing service to God ;

and that no honest person, though busied in meaner offices, may ever hereafter, by reason of these offices, become contemptible in the estimation of Christ's disciples.

And the signs which the angel gave to discover the babe were no marks of lustre and vanity, for Christ came to combat the whole body of sin, and to destroy every province of Satan's kingdom—"the lust of the flesh, and the lust of eyes, and the pride of life"—and we must take Him for our pattern and our helper, praying to Him not only to teach us, but also to give us power and ability.

The Prayer.

BLESSED and eternal Jesus, at Whose birth the quires of angels sang praises to God and proclaimed peace to men, sanctify our will and inferior affections, bring us within the terms of Thy peace, that we be holy and dead to sin,

delivered from the pomps and vanity of a wicked world, humble and charitable. Unmoved by fear of men, uncorrupted by evil enticements and seductions, not craving for honour, nor greedy for fulness and plenty ; may we be diligent in the employment Thou givest us, faithful in the discharge of our trusts, moderate in our desires, content in the dealings of Thy providence. In such dispositions may we receive and entertain heavenly visitations, and revelations of Thee and Thy blessings, that so we may be brought into Thy presence, there to see Thy beauties, and admire Thy graces, and imitate Thy imitable excellencies, and rest in Thee for ever—in this world by the perseverance of a godly, righteous, and sober life, and in the world to come by the participation of the happiness which Thou hast prepared for them who seek and serve Thee in spirit and in truth. Amen.

The Wise Men from the East.

GOD, Who is the Father of all men, at the nativity of the Messias gave notice of it to all the world, as it was represented by the grand division of Jews and Gentiles. To the Jewish shepherds it was by an angel, to the eastern magi by a star. As God's love was, so was the dispensation of it, "without respect of persons," catholic and wide-spread ; for all being included under the curse of sin were to Him equally, and without distinction, objects of mercy. The grace of God, being like the air we breathe, "hath appeared to all men," but the conveyance and communication of it were different in degree and in manner. The angel told the simple-minded shepherds a plain

and literal story ; the wise men were invited by an object strange and miraculous in its appearance.

So it is that the grace of God prevents, that is, is beforehand with us. A stone thrown into the calmly flowing river first moves the surface and disturbs it into a circle, and then the water of its own force wafts the neighbouring fluid into a larger figure ; so is the grace of God the first principle of our spiritual motion. It moves as into its own figure, and having actuated and strengthened our natural powers by the influence of that first incentive, leaves us to continue the motion and enlarge the progress. But as the circle on the face of the river grows weaker, till it hath smoothed itself into a natural and even current, unless the force be renewed, so does all our natural endeavour when first set awake by God's preventing grace, decline to its own imperfection, unless

the same supernatural influence do interpose to continue or renew it.

And so it was that the eastern magi, being first moved to wonder and curiosity by the appearance of the star, were very far from finding Jesus by that general and indefinite signification. - But then the goodness of God's grace increased its own influence on them. As an inspiration from the Spirit of God had admonished them to look for a star, had showed the star that they might find it, had taught them to acknowledge it, instructed them to understand its purpose and induced them to follow it—so it never left them until they had found the holy Jesus. In like manner God deals with us. He gives us the first grace and adds the second, grace for grace. He enlightens our understandings and lends activity to our faculties, sweetly allures us by the prospect of rewards, and wounds us with the arrows of His

loving corrections. He warms us with fire from Heaven, ever giving us new assistance or increasing the old, refreshing us with comforts, or arming us with patience. Sometimes He stirs our affections by the lights held out to our understanding, sometimes brings confidence to our understanding by the emotion of our affections, till, by variety of means, we at last arrive at Bethlehem, there to find the infant Jesus in the beginnings of a Christian life. This we shall certainly do if we follow the invitations of grace and use those means which are given to instruct us, to help us, to invite us, but not to force our endeavours and compel our co-operation.

Although God, to bless the holy desires of these wise men, did sanctify their science, if it were not even their superstition—for they may have been astrologers rather than astronomers—by making the star to guide them

through their journey as far as to Jerusalem, when they came there the star disappeared. Their faith and the activity of their desires were thus put to the test. They were reminded that God is the Lord of all creation, and dispenses His favours as He wills; that He can as well take them away as indulge them, and that they must be sought by ordinary and appointed means and ministries, where such are to be had. The extraordinary and miraculous guidance ceased, and being at Jerusalem those inquirers could find them whose office and profession obliged them to learn whatever God had revealed about the Messias. For God loves order, and regularly and certainly demands of us that we use those ordinary ministries which are of His own appointing. Having used those which are extraordinary but as architects do frames of wood to support the arches till they be built, He takes them away

when the work is ready and leaves us to resort to those other which He hath designed for us. To these He hath given such efficacy that they need no miracle to make them persuasive and operative in His faithful. S. Paul's sermon could convert as many as if Moses had risen from the grave to persuade them. And now the Gospel of Christ hath not only the same truth, but the same evidence and virtue also which it had when it was "confirmed by signs following" its first preaching, if only men would receive it.

When they were come to the doctors of the Jews, the wise men asked boldly and openly, under the ear and eye of a tyrant prince, bloody and timorous, jealous and ambitious, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Thus they gave evidence of their faith, and their fearless confidence in their profession; upbraiding the nation who had done nothing to make inquiry after

the new-born king, nor would now stir one step to visit Him. Whence we may learn to be open and fearless in our religion, and not to consider our temporal when they once come to contest against our religious interests.

The doctors of the Jews told the wise men where Christ was to be born ; the magi address themselves at once to see and to worship Him, while (as has been said) the doctors themselves stir not. When the former departed from Jerusalem, the star appeared, and they "rejoiced with exceeding great joy." To new converts and persons in their first addresses to the worship of God, such comforts from without are often granted to their soul and spirit. They are the foretastes and the pledges of the feasts and overflowings of eternity.

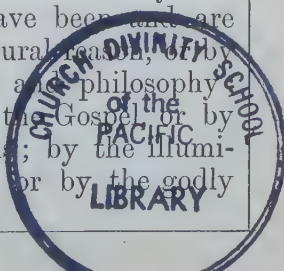
When they came to Bethlehem, and the star guided them to a stable, they entered in, without being stayed for a moment by the mean lodging and poor

condition of the holy Child, and seeing Him they bowed themselves before Him to the very ground, first giving *themselves* an oblation to their King, and then offering to Him their gifts—for a man's person is first accepted and then his gift; all outward services and tributes being made acceptable by the previous presentation of an inward sacrifice. If we have first dedicated ourselves, then our gift is pleasant, as coming but to avouch the truth of the first sacrifice. If our persons be not first devoted to God, the lesser oblations of outward presents are like sacrifices without salt and fire—nothing can make them pleasant or religious.

These magi laid before the babe gold and frankincense and myrrh—gold as for their King, incense as for their God, myrrh as for the Son of Man. And the presents were also representative of interior virtues, the myrrh signifying faith, mortification, chastity,

conscience, and all the purifying actions of spiritual life ; the incense signifying hope, prayer, obedience, good intention, and all the actions and devotions that ascend to Heaven ; the giving the gold representing contempt of riches, poverty of spirit, and all the excellencies and self-denial of love to God and our neighbours united in one life.

And thus in one view and two instances, hath God drawn all the world to Himself by His Son Jesus, shepherds and magi, Jews and Gentiles, learned and unlearned, rich and poor, noble and mean, that in Him all nations and all conditions, and all families and all persons, might be blessed. By one star or other all have been and are being called ; by natural reason, or by the secrets of science and philosophy, by the revelations of the Gospel, or by the ministry of angels ; by the illumination of the Spirit, or by the godly



teaching of spiritual pastors and masters. The lesson consigned to us is that we appear not before the Lord empty, but offer gifts to Him by the liberalities or by the affections of charity—that we bring to Him, either the worshipping or the oblations of religion, either the riches of the world or the love of the soul. If we cannot bring gold with the rich Arabians, we may, with the poor shepherds, come and “kiss the Son lest He be angry,” and in all cases come and “serve Him with fear and reverence,” yet with spiritual gladness.

The Prayer.

MOST holy Jesus, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the true Israel, give unto us spirits teachable, pious, prudent and humble, that no inward motion or outward invitation of Thy grace be without effect with us.

Create in us such goodness as may fit us to be presented to Thy glorious majesty. Accept the oblation of ourselves our souls and bodies, and take us to Thee to be wholly and for ever Thine. Enlighten our understanding, sanctify our will, fill our thoughts with remembrances of Thy exceeding great love for us, and meditations on Thy infinite perfection. Lord, we are Thine, reject us not from Thy favour, shut us not out from Thy presence, turn not Thine eyes away from our unworthy worship and our insufficient services ; so that abiding with Thee in mind and heart, and Thou with us by the indwelling of Thy Holy Spirit, we may partake of the glories of that kingdom in which Thou reignest eternally. Amen.

John the Baptist.

“IN those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” By the great reputation of his sanctity he prevailed upon the affections and judgment of the people, who with much ease believed his doctrine when they had reason to approve his life. The good example of the preacher is always the most prevailing homily: his life is his best sermon. And so it is with the hearer too. Would he also preach the truth and the righteousness which he has been taught?—let him practise them.

The Baptist for about thirty years had lived in the wilderness, under the

discipline of the Holy Ghost, under the tuition of angels, in conversation with God, in mortification, and separation from the world, his garments rugged, his meat plain, necessary but without variety, his employment prayer and devotion, his ordinary company wild beasts, his extraordinary messengers from Heaven. All this is not undertaken of necessity, to subdue a bold and dangerous passion, or to punish a grievous sin, but to become more pure from the lesser stains and insinuations of too often infirmities, and so prepare himself for the great ministry of proclaiming the coming of his Lord. It was a rare patience and an exemplary mortification of self. We use not to be so persistent in our pious resolutions, but our purposes give way when they feel the first hindrance. We are free and confident in intentions to be abstinent when we are yet full, but have not yet digested our fulness ; to

control or deny our appetite when the sickness of surfeit has not yet passed away ; to pledge ourselves to temperance while yet the after headache is punishing our excess ; which things are figures also of motions and states of our souls and spirits. They have their likenesses in our affections, our tastes, our studies, our business, our repose, and whatever else may too much divert our heart and mind from the love and service of our God. When the infirmity of our nature seems but to breathe on it, how quickly does our zeal cool and dissolve into air upon the first temptation. Then indeed, we can be active, but it is in searching for excuses and justifying desires to reconcile our nature and our conscience, unless our fears be too great and our sins too clamorous, and the burthen on our conscience too intolerable, and no peace to be had without suffering contradiction of nature, for the advantages

of grace. Shall not the example of the Baptist entice us a little farther than the customs of the world or our own disinclination would engage us?

But after the expiration of a time John came forth from his solitude; and although in that solitude he did breathe a purer inspiration, God was more familiar and frequent in His visitations, yet was there prepared for him a more excellent service. In solitude men may go to Heaven by the way of prayer, and devotion and meditation, but in society they may as surely go there by the way of mercy and charity, and ministry to others. In solitude there are fewer occasions of vices, but there is also the exercise of fewer virtues; and the temptations, though they be not from so many objects, yet are in some circumstances more dangerous. Spiritual pride, the worst of evils, can always creep in like ivy upon a lonely oak in the forest and

suck the heart out. A great self-mortifier without some self-complacencies, or affectations, or opinions, or other vain singularity, is almost as unusual as virgin purity and unstained thoughts in the theatres and halls of night-long masquerade and revelry. Whatsoever temptation doth invade retirement, it hath no eyes upon it but Heaven's, no shame to encounter, no fears of discovery ; and as the recluse communicate less with the world, so do they less charity and fewer offices of mercy. No comforts for them of a public religion, or visible remonstrances of the communion of saints. And all this is true of lives and institutions of less retirement in proportion to the degree of the solitude ; and therefore church-story reports of divers very holy persons, who left their wildernesses and sweetnesses of solitary devotion to serve God in public by ways of charity and personal offices.

Upon this ground some of the greatest admirers of the hermit's, or the close monastic life, have attributed to the pastoral office a nearer approach to perfection, because of the inestimable advantage and honour of gaining souls for Christ: of which be it said that it needs not the laying on of hands for the humblest Christian—man or woman—to partake by watchful use of opportunities.

After that the Baptist by a sign from Heaven was confirmed in spirit and understanding that Jesus was the Messias, he immediately published to the Jews what God had manifested to him. And first to the priests and Levites, sent from the Sanhedrim, he professed indefinitely that himself was “not the Christ, nor that prophet” whom they, by a special tradition did expect to be revealed, they knew not when. Concerning himself, definitely he said nothing, but that he was “the voice

of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord." He it was Who was then amongst them, but not known, a person of great dignity, to whom the Baptist was not worthy to do the office of the lowest ministry, "Who coming after John was preferred before him," Who was to increase and the Baptist was to decrease, Who did baptize "with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

It was an excellent sweetness of religion that had entirely possessed the soul of the Baptist, that in so great reputation for sanctity, so mighty concourse of people, so great multitude of disciples and companions, and such throngs of admirers, he was without mixture of vanity, and confirmed in his disposition and piety against the strength of a most strong and the subtlety of a most subtle temptation. He refused every great name that was offered him, for he had but to answer,

“Yes, I am,” and he would have been owned with loud and general acclamation. But he declared himself to be only “a voice,” the lowest of things that can have existence, whose being depends upon the speaker, just as himself did upon the pleasure of God, receiving form and publication and application wholly by the will of his Lord, in order to the manifestation of the eternal Word.

It were well that the spirits of men would not claim more than their own, though they did not by denial lessen their just dues. It may concern some end of piety or prudence that our reputation be preserved by all proper means, but never that we assume the dues of others, or feed our vanity by dressing ourselves in an undeserved dignity. Honours are the rewards of virtue or the performance of laborious or difficult duties for the public use; but then they must suppose a good

motive and a rightful conduct. He that assumes the titles and offices of others, and dresses himself with their deservings, hath no more solid reputation than he would have nutriment if he ate only with their mouth, slept none but their slumbers.

John's sermons were exhortations to repentance and a holy life. He gave particular counsels to several states of persons ; sharply reproved the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and impiety, it being worse in them because contrary to their rule, their profession, and their position ; gently guided others into the ways of righteousness, calling them the "straight ways of the Lord," that is the direct and shortest way to the kingdom, for as every angle is a turning out of the way, so every sin is an obliquity, and interrupts the journey. By such discourses and a baptism he disposed the spirits of men for the reception of Messiah and the homilies of the Gospel.

Nor is this all, for look back at his birth when his father was "an old man," and his mother, like Sarah, "well stricken in years." May we not see in this, as in a figure, a call and encouragement to old age in its hopeless tardiness, to bring forth fruit unto God, even the fruit which is "unto holiness, and the end everlasting life"? But let the younger sinful ones take notice that in John's instance, as in Isaac's, the birth was miraculous; he was "wonderfully born."

The Prayer.

O HOLY and most glorious Lord God, Who before the public ministry of Thy eternal Son didst send Thy servant, John Baptist, to remove the impediments of sin, that the ways of his Lord and ours might be made clear, ready, and speedy; be pleased to let Thy Holy Spirit lead us in the straight

paths of righteousness, without departures on either hand, and without the fall into any deadly sin. Obediently, zealously, carefully, and with a persevering diligence, may we walk in the straight paths of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For His reception whenever He shall come may we always be prepared, that He may ever be pleased in dwelling with us. Make us also to dwell with Him, withdrawing sometimes into His recesses and privacies by contemplation, and in admiring His glories and learning the secrets of His kingdom. At all other times may we walk as in the courts of His ever-open temple by the devotions and labours of repentance and a godly life, until by His Spirit He hath fitted us to enter for ever into the fulness of His joy. Amen.

THE SECOND ADVENT.

The Coming to Judgment.—i.

VIRTUE and vice are so essentially distinguished, and the distinction is so necessary to be observed in order to the well-being of men in private and in societies, that to divide them in themselves, and to separate them by sufficient marks, and to discriminate them by their consequences, hath been designed by all laws, by the sayings of wise men, by the order of things, and by their proportions of good and evil. That virtue may have a proper seat in the will and in the affections, and may become dear by its own excellency and blessing, and that vice may be as naturally repugnant to man as a wolf

to the lamb, and as darkness to light, destructive of his being and a contradiction of his nature, hath ever been the aim and hope of the highest human intelligence.

But it is not enough that the world hath thus armed itself against vice, and by all that is wise and sober amongst men, hath taken the part of virtue, adorning it with glorious titles, encouraging it by rewards, entertaining it with sweetness, and commanding it by laws, fortifying it with defences, and accommodating itself to it by numberless compliances. All this does not satisfy man's necessity. It will, indeed, in all modest men, secure their actions in theatres and highways, in markets and churches, before the eye of judges and in the society of witnesses; but the actions of closets and chambers, the designs and thoughts of men, their discourses in dark places, and the doings of retirements and of

the night, are left indifferent to virtue or to vice. Of these, as man can take no cognizance, so he can impose on them no restraint ; wherefore above one half of human conduct is by the laws of man left unguarded and unprovided for. And therefore God hath so ordained it that there shall be a day of doom, wherein all that is let alone by men shall be questioned by God, and every word and every action shall receive its just recompense of reward. Things are so ordered by the Great Lord of all the creatures that whatsoever we do or suffer shall be called to account ; and this account shall be exact, and the sentence shall be just, and the reward shall be great. All the evils of all the world shall be amended, and the injustices shall be repaid, and the Divine providence shall be vindicated, and virtue and vice shall be for ever separated and marked by the diversity of their abodes.

As to the persons to be so judged, they are you and I and all mankind : kings and priests, nobles and learned, the crafty and the easy, the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the tyrant and the oppressed—all shall appear to receive their lot ; and this so far from abating anything from its concernment to each individual much increases it. Sorrow, indeed, is apt to be more felt when it is called forth by the rarity as well as the extremity of another's suffering. If affliction befall any one which is more sore than is common to our fellow men, companions of our besetting sin, brethren of our nature and partners of our usual accidents, the singularity of the chance may heighten our estimate of its pain as well as our apprehension of sharing it. But this does not apply to final and extreme cases which are actually our own as well as others'.

It may be imagined, not unreasonably,

that when the first day of judgment happened — that (I mean) of the Deluge—the calamity swelled like the flood, and well nigh every one saw friend or friends perish—the neighbours of his dwelling, the relatives of his family, the sharer of his joys, yesterday's bride and the new-born heir, the priest of his worship and the honoured of his house—all included in the Divine visitation. Could "the terror of the Lord" have been lessened to any one by the numerousness of those who perished with him? Knowing, therefore, the terrors of the Lord, as the Scriptures have revealed them to us, we would persuade men not to think lightly of the Dies Iræ, the dreadful day when the dead shall be judged out of those things which are written in the book of the Lord according to their works.

And what of Him Who we believe will be the Judge?

We first perceive that He is concerned in the injury done by the crimes which He will sentence. "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." It was for our sins—yours and mine—that the Judge did suffer such unspeakable pains as were enough to reconcile all the world to God. The sum and spirit of those pains could not be better understood than from His own words, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He felt such pure unmingled sorrows that, although His human nature was personally united to the Godhead, yet at that moment He derived no comfort from sense of that union, but was so overwhelmed in sorrow that His Godhead seemed to have forsaken Him.

Beyond this nothing can be added to heighten the misery ; but then that any one of us should have done his part to make all this vain and ineffective, that Christ his Lord and Judge should be

tormented for nothing, that he would not accept pardon and happiness when Jesus purchased them for him at so dear a price—how great must be the condemnation of such an one! I ask him—How shalt thou look upon Him that fainted and died for the love of thee? Thou hast scorned His miraculous mercies. How shalt thou dare to behold that holy face that brought salvation to thee, and thou didst turn away to fall in love with death and kiss deformity and sins? In beholding that face consists much of the blessedness of eternity. All the pains and passions, the sorrows and the groans, the humility and poverty, the labours and the watchings, the prayers and the sermons, the miracles and the prophecies, the scourge and the nails, the death and the burial, the shame and the smart, the cross and the grave of Jesus, have been taken part in by thee in refusing the mercies

and design of their holy ends and purposes.

Christ may be “crucified again,” and upon a new account “put to an open shame.” For after that He had done all this by the direct action of His priestly office in sacrificing Himself for us, He hath also done many more things for us, which are also the fruits of His first love and furthering of our redemption. I will not quote any of the singular acts of mercy which our Lord uses to bring us to live holy lives ; but I consider that things are so ordered, and so great a value is set upon our souls, since they are the images of God, and redeemed by the blood of the holy Lamb, that their salvation is reckoned as a part of Christ’s reward, or part of the glorification of His humanity. So it is that our blessed Lord feels the fruits of His holy death, the acceptance of His holy sacrifice, the graciousness of His person, the return of His

prayers, in the repentance and consequent pardon of sinners.

[This is the joy of our Lord Himself directly : it is that of the angels only by reflection. The joy, said our blessed Saviour, shall be “in the presence of the angels” ; they shall see the glory of the Lord ; the answering of His prayers ; the satisfaction of His desires, and the reward of His sufferings. For therefore He once suffered, and for that reason He rejoices for ever ; and, therefore, when a penitent sinner comes to receive the effect and full consummation of his pardon, it is called an “entering into the joy of his Lord ;” that is, not only the joy which his Lord hath won for him, but especially a partaking of that joy which Christ Himself derives from that conversion and hath enjoyed ever since.*]

And now, upon these suppositions, we may imagine what it will be for any

* From the Holy Living, c. iv. sec. ix.

one to meet, as his judge, Him Whom he has helped to murder, Whose honour to disparage, Whose purposes to defeat, Whose passion to make ineffectual, and Whose love to trample under foot.

The Prayer.

O ALMIGHTY God, who wert pleased to look upon us at our birth, to reconcile us when we were enemies, to forgive us in our provocations, even making atonement for us by the death of Thy Son, and by His life working for us life eternal ; let Thy Divine Spirit so assist and encourage our endeavours, guide our will, and fortify our intentions, that we may not fall utterly away from that holy condition in which we were placed by our baptism into Christ. Let Thy preventing grace throw back and put to flight all temptations in their approach ; let Thy accompanying grace enable us to resist them in the assault,

and overcome them in the fight; or if Thou permittest us at any time to fall, yet let us not lie sleeping in sin, or rise up only to resume our walk in its downward course. May we never presume upon Thy goodness, nor distrust Thy mercies; nor defer our penitence; nor place our confidence anywhere but in Thee. By timely, constant, and sedulous endeavour may we make our calling and election sure, living to Thee and dying to Thee; that, having sown to the Spirit, we may in the same Spirit reap unsullied sanctity and never failing bliss. Amen.

The Coming to Judgment.—ii.

I WILL draw a short scheme, which, although it must be infinitely short of what God hath done for our salvation, yet should be enough to help us much in preparing our minds for His judgment.

God did not only give His Son for an example, and His Son give Himself for a price for us ; but both gave the Holy Spirit to assist us in the highest graces, for the verification of faith, and the entertainment of hope, and the increase and perseverance of charity. He gave us a new birth, He put another principle into us—a constitution capable of perfection. We have the Spirit put into us to be a part of us, as properly to produce actions of holy life as the

soul in the body does produce the natural. He hath exalted human nature and made it in Jesus Christ to sit above the highest seat of angels, and the angels are made our ministering spirits ever since their Lord became our brother. Christ hath, by a mysterious Sacrament, given us His body to eat and His blood to drink. He made ways that we may become all one with Him. He hath given us a religion whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light if we would but understand it and put it to proof. He hath established our felicity upon natural and pleasant conditions, and we are to be happy hereafter if we suffer Him to make us happy here. Things are so ordered that a man must take more pains to perish than to be saved. God hath found out sure ways to make our prayers acceptable—our weak petitions, the desires of our imperfect souls, to prevail with Him. He will deny us nothing but to do us ill offices, to

give us poisons and dangers, and evil nourishment, and temptations. Such mighty power hath He given to the prayers of His servants, yet will He not be moved by such else potent and mighty means to do any man an evil turn, or to grant him one mischief. In that only God can deny us.

[And if it be asked, “Doth He not sometimes hear men according to their idols, and take them at their own vain words?” the answer is that such is not His own doing, but the sinner’s, whose hard and impenitent heart has provoked Him to leave him to himself.]

In all things else God hath made all that is excellent in heaven and earth to join towards holy and happy effects. Christ, at His right hand, makes intercession for us, and the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings unutterable; and all the holy men of the world pray for all, and for everyone; and God hath instructed us with

Scripture and precedents, and assistances, direct and indirect, to pray; and He encourages us with divers excellent promises and parables, and examples, and teaches us what to pray, and how; and gives one promise to public prayers and another to private, and to both the assurance of being heard unless by some means sin hath made His hearing impossible. What then, can excuse us if, when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, we are proved to have abused such numberless and great mercies?

There are two great days in which the fate of all the world is transacted. This life is man's day, in which man does what he will, and God holds his peace. Man destroys his brother and destroys himself, and tempts to sin, and delights in it, and drinks drunk, and forgets his sorrow, and makes money and wins reputations, makes others fear him, sears his conscience

and denies the faith ; and all this while God is silent, save that He makes His holy Word to be heard plainly, but leaves men to their own desires, and their course of life to their own choice.

But then God shall have His day too. The day shall come when He shall speak, and no man shall gainsay Him. Unless we hear God speak now, and do His work and serve His interest, and bear ourselves as He requires and enables us, His voice that is now calling us in love, shall be as thunder against us in anger.

Let us therefore so “judge ourselves that we be not judged of the Lord.” The way to prevent God’s anger is to be angry with ourselves. By examining our actions and condemning the criminal, we become as assessors in God’s tribunal, and by lending our aid to His court may hope to win favour with One Who wants but inducements to be gracious towards us.

To this end self-examinations, close, frequent and regular, are the surest means. For if we make but one general account, and never reckon until we are dying, either we shall only reckon by great sums, and remember nothing but clamorous and crying sins ; or if we could consider all that we ought, we must needs be confounded with the multitude and variety of our failures and offences.

Think of the disorders of every day, the multitude of idle words, the portions of time spent in vanity, the frequent omissions of duty, the coldness of prayers, the indifference of our spirit in holy things, our secret faults, our deceits and hypocrisies, our want of charity, our abuses of the liberty which God gives us, besides the infinite variety of cases of conscience which we decide on no principle of satisfying God above all ; from all which we may find that the reckonings of a man's life are

business enough for every day of it, and intricate as the accounts of busy bankers and trafficking merchants. They should be summed up as at the foot of every page of the ledger—I mean that we should call ourselves to scrutiny every time that we have to lie down in those little images of death which are our nightly slumbers.

And this will appear highly fitting if we remember that, at the day of the Lord, not only the greatest lines of life, but its several branches of action, word, and thought may be expected to undergo inquiry and judgment; in-somuch that it was a great truth which Augustine said, “Woe be to the most innocent life if God should deal with it without mixture of mercy.” It was the advice even of a heathen master to his scholars—“Let not sleep seize upon the regions of your senses, before you have three times recalled the conversations and accidents of the day.”

Examine what you have committed against the Divine law, what you have omitted of your duty, and in what you have made use of the Divine grace to the purposes of righteousness and religion, joining the judge, reason, to the legislative mind, conscience, that God may reign there as a lawgiver and a judge. Then Christ's kingdom is set up in the heart; then we always live under the eye of our "Judge eternal," and live by the measures of reason, godliness and true wisdom.

A daily or frequent examination of the parts of our life will interrupt the proceeding and hinder the journey of little sins into a heap; and though God is not "extreme to mark what is done amiss," and therefore puts many faults and wrong doings upon the accounts of His mercy and the title of the Cross, yet these little sins will combine and cluster into great bunches. But as a taper, which, when its flame

is newly blown off, retains a nature so akin to light that it will rekindle and snatch a flame from a neighbouring fire, so is the soul of man when it is newly fallen into sin. Although God be angry with it, and the state of His favour and its own graciousness be interrupted, yet the habit is not naturally changed, and we shall best prevent the gathering into a heap by our daily or nightly thoughts and prayers and severe sentences. The sand can check the tumultuous pride and become a limit to the sea when it is in a heap and in united multitudes, but if the wind scatter and divide its grains, the little drops and the vainer froth of the water begin to invade the strand. Our sighs can scatter little offences; but then let us be sure to breathe such accents frequently, lest they knot and combine and grow big as the shore, and we perish in sand, that is, in trifling instances. “He that

despiseth little things shall perish by little and little," saith the son of Sirach.

*The Prayer.**

ALMIGHTY God, Father of Mercies, the God of Peace and Comfort, of Rest and Patience, Who knowest all the necessities and all the infirmities of Thy servants, fortify our spirits with spiritual joys, and take from us all degrees of inordinate or insecure affection to this world. Enlarge our hearts with desires to be with Thee, and of freedom from sins and enjoyment of the means of grace. Let not any pain or passion discompose the order and sobriety of our thoughts and duties, and lay no more trials upon us than Thou wilt make us able to bear. Together with our temptations do Thou provide for us ways to escape, even by the mercies of a longer and holier life

* A compilation from Jeremy Taylor.

or by those of a Christian's death. Even as it pleaseth Thee, O Lord, so let it be. And whenever Thou callest our souls from their prison in the flesh, grant that in the union of the holy Jesus and in the services of piety and benevolence they may be presented unto Thee blameless, and washed completely clean in that blood which alone can take away their sins. Amen.

Judgment, Present and Future.

WHEN we sing our *Te Deum* hymn, we declare our belief that God “shall come to be our Judge;” but this is not all our creed about His coming—His, that is to say, God’s in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Some men’s sins,” says the Apostle Paul, “are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some, they follow after.” Yes! Christ’s judgment is not only one great and, as it were, one single transaction of a future which we commonly think of as too far off to need that we should take as yet much account of it, or it may be any. It would certainly seem to be very remote for any signs that we can—or should it be said, that we

will?—discern of it; but it is none the less certainly close at hand, unless the Scriptures speak falsely and only to alarm us with empty threats. On this very day, at this very hour, in this very place, He that shall come does come for one and all of us. If God is fully acquainted, as He needs must be, with all that we, and every human being think, and say, and do at all times, and in all places, it is impossible that He should not determine, the moment the thought is entertained, the word spoken, and the deed done, whether it is good or evil, right or wrong, true or false, pleasing to Him or displeasing, pardonable or deserving punishment.

Upon the whole man, as his life shall be gathered into unity at the Last Day, it may be conceived, though with great difficulty, that He keeps His judgment in a mysterious suspense; but of each several portion of

our life, as it becomes known to Him—that is, as it comes into being—He must, from His very nature and that of His relation to us as living and moving and having our being in Him, form His estimate even sooner than we can form our own.

The results of that estimate are continually disclosed by the chastenings which we receive at His hands; and blessed are they in whom such temporal visitations answer their gracious purpose, “tribulation working patience, and patience experience, and experience hope,” if turned to their right account. But there are those to whom the whole of the verse quoted from S. Paul will apply—being judged now, in the sense of suffering chastisement, they will be none the less, if it should not be said all the more, so judged hereafter. These are they who “despise the chastening of the Lord.” They do not choose to believe that it

comes from Him, or that, whether by permitting, or actually inflicting, He has anything at all to do with it. Or if they do attribute it to Him they do not take it in the way in which most erring children take the corrections of a loving parent, but rather with the temper of a wilful schoolboy or a hardened culprit, resenting against their punisher, as if he were moved by hatred or malice, when he may have been no willing agent in the performance of a bounden duty. Like the oppressing city spoken of by Zephaniah, they "receive not correction," according to what the very word presumes, "trust not in the Lord, and draw not near to God," but rather disregard Him and flee from Him.

Theirs is a truly fearful state of mind, but perhaps it is not more to be deplored as hopeless than is theirs who, "being without chastisement," are lured into forgetfulness of all judgment.

Having none now, they take it for granted that they neither deserve it or are likely ever to receive it. It may be said of them that their sins do not go before, but will assuredly follow after to judgment. That is seemingly a hard saying which we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "If ye be without chastisement whereof all"—that is, all God's true children—"are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons;" and therefore it is that holy men, in their prosperity or their mere freedom from troubles, have been known to suffer deep anxiety. The smooth and gentle running of their life's current has seemed to them as if God were not treating them as a father. "For what son is he whom a father chasteneth not?"

But it would need no argument nor much reflection to make such good men understand that that very anxiety of theirs was meant for a chastening. It

was "not joyous but grievous," and was designed to lead on to that self-judgment—that deep and searching trial of faith and feeling and life—which would, by God's grace assisting them, work in them whatever was left undone for want of temporal suffering. Scarcely is there any pain more sore to a generous heart than that which is inflicted by the kindness of one whom the receiver of that kindness has wronged through failure of consideration. Let then the prosperous and the untroubled Christian ask himself—and he will speedily get an answer from his inmost breast—Have I done aught to wrong, or to slight, or to affront, or to displease my loving Lord, the Saviour Who gave Himself for me—His life for mine? No one who has not seared his conscience and quenched the Spirit within him, but must feel his head burning as with coals of fire when the question receives its reply.

“Let a man examine himself . . . for if we would judge ourselves we shall not be judged. But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” of the ungodly.

Our judgment by the Son of Man then is a present one—it is about our path—and about our bed, and taking note of all our ways. But as an act final and unchangeable it is with respect to most of us (and God be thanked for it) one that is yet to come. The trial and its verdict still await us. It may be that we are looking for it, and cannot number our days without being sensible that we are hasting to it: but do we encourage the expectation? Our lamps are burning too low—they are not trimmed by self-restraint—their light is dimmed through fear of men—the oil of grace has been too scantily provided. “Spare me a little that I may recover my

strength before I go hence and am seen no more," is with most of us the prayer of our inmost soul when we cannot but hear the cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh," and it is a prayer which may rise up from the most true and faithful of the Lord's servants.

And what shall be said of the weak in faith, and of them who are altogether wanting in it? Is it not in mercy—the mercy of that Son of Man who, as our Judge no less than as our High Priest, our fellow in humanity and not our God only—is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and has been "in all points tempted like as we are"—is it not in His tender mercy and His wise consideration and His watchful care, that even while He says "I am coming to acquit or condemn you according as you shall have treated Me while I was with you;" He also says, "I am here to seek and to save you if you will but let Me dwell with

you and be in you"? To each individual Christian He speaks, saying, "I am that Word which is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and thy mind; and I am that Word which shall say to thee, when I sit high-throned in the glory I have won for thee, either 'Depart from Me' or 'Come up to Me,' this day and throughout eternity." Present though absent, and absent though present, Jesus Christ is the same to us "yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Believe it, for it is spoken in righteousness and mighty to save.

The Prayer.

O HOLY and most gracious Saviour, when Thou shalt bring us all before Thee in the Day of Thy appearing again, show Thyself our Redeemer and our Advocate as well as our Judge. Lord, remember then that Thou hast for so many ages wrought for the forgiveness

of those sins which Thou wilt then have to take account of. Let not the accusations of our consciences, nor the charges of the evil one whom Thou didst overcome for us, nor the justice of Thy wrath, prevail against those souls which Thou didst live and die and rise again to make Thine own. Enable us by the supporting hand of Thy mercy to stand upright before Thy tribunal. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, let Thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in Thee. Let us "obtain joy and gladness," and for ever dwell in the courts of Thy house, feeling Thy love, supported by Thy graciousness, absolved by Thy voice, saved by Thy mercy, and glorying in Thy glory. Amen.

The Various Comings of the Lord.

To flatter their unbelief in Jesus of Nazāreth, and to encourage them under the long delay of their Messiah, the Jews are said to use a saying, "Blessed is he who waits." Not being able to bid welcome to Him Who has come, they seek satisfaction in expecting one who, as they look for him, certainly never will come; so that turning their beatitude into a woe, we may say of them with sorrow, "Alas! for those who wait."

If the hope of the Jew deceives him, it is not so with that of the Christian. He has received joyfully the fulfilment of God's first promises, and so stands on sure ground in waiting with confidence

for the accomplishment of all that he has still to look for. Believing in Him that hath come, he neither looks for nor desires another. No doubt He Who came stayed but a little while—three years only of a ministering life, and thirty only of an earthly—but He promised to come again, and we are therefore quite sure that He will come. He told us that His going away was expedient for us, and that assurance keeps us patient, and has so kept us for centuries. He did not tell us how long it would be before He returned, but that matters little since we do know that, for every necessary purpose, we have but a short time during which we shall be sensible of delay. With the youngest of us it will be but a few years before we shall find ourselves in that mysterious world where time shall be no longer.

Century after century the world felt itself to be in bondage, and looked out

for its Deliverer. The prophet Haggai refers to Him as "the desire of all nations ;" but He was the expectation and the longed-for of one people in particular. Of Israel all the patriarchs and all the prophets had, like Jacob, looked for His salvation, and what they did for the first coming of the Christ we are doing for His second. The presence to which they had to direct their eyes was that in which His founding of the Church by His sufferings and His blood held the first place ; that for which we are waiting is so far like theirs that it is the Church's deliverance by His power, and the triumph which He will achieve for her over all her enemies. It is of the former of these two comings that He says, "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world." Upon this point our desires are satisfied. When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son ; "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us ;" and

if He has not continued so to dwell, to be "seen with our eyes, and looked upon, and handled with our hands," as to John and others was permitted, He promises by that same beloved disciple that He will come again and receive unto Himself all who have the faith and heart of John, that where He now is there they may be also.

But there are other comings of His which must not be lost sight of. He came to us with His grace when we were admitted into His Church by Holy Baptism: He comes to us again when we gather round His holy table. "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door"—the door of his soul—"I will come into him, and I will sup with him and he with Me"—a presence none the less real because it is invisible. Nay, we have His assurance that where two or three are gathered together in His name, whatever the truly Christian

purpose, there is He in the midst of them. He has come from Heaven to bless their design. He comes to us with His deliverance, and His comfort in our afflictions: nay, as was shadowed forth more times than one, He comes to us even in our festivities, so they be free from extravagance and excess, innocent and mindful that He is present.

By the coming of the Lord the sacred writers sometimes mean, in the first instance, the destruction of Jerusalem—that signal example of Divine vengeance upon “a disobedient and gainsaying people.” So of the punishment of apostate or hopelessly corrupt Churches. Remember the warning to that Church which had once been thought worthy to be addressed by the Apostle Paul in words describing the most glorious privileges; as, “You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins;” “ye who were

sometimes afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ ; ” “ ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Had they given due heed to the entreaty to “ walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called,” the Son of Man would not have bidden so stern a message to be delivered to them as this—“ Repent and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.” Not one of us but has a candlestick, upon the removal of which our darkness would be the shadow of death—a blackness of darkness deepening into endless night.

If the destruction of Jerusalem was the first event to which the sacred writers looked when they proclaimed the Lord’s coming it was because that event was the nearest of a succession long and various and some more startling

than others, but all leading to and preparing for that which S. Paul calls a "glorious appearing," and the Lord Himself a coming of the Son of Man "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, where he received the Law from the hands of God, he appeared to the people who stood below awaiting his return to be completely changed. They "could not steadfastly behold him" because of the brightness which beamed from his countenance. And it is the same Jesus (as the two angels assured His disciples) Who had ascended into Heaven that shall come again from thence; but it will be in a form and with accompaniments very different from those of His moving through the cities and villages of Jewry with His little knot of peasants and fishermen.

His first manifestation was in a manner obscure. It left room for faith,

that none might be compelled to acknowledge Him, foreshowing of what kind He would have to be the reception of His Gospel through the ages to come. But "the great and terrible day" to which we are looking forward will give us no choice whether or not we will obey the summons of its trumpet, or in what guise we will present ourselves before the Judge. There must every one of us "*appear*," a word which means "be made manifest"—"plainly seen," so as to be "known and read" of every eye which shall be suffered to rest upon us.

But it cannot be doubted that, in the mercy of our God, and through the atoning power of His Son's death, sinners may escape that most terrible exposure; but it must be done "before they go hence and are seen no more" by mortal eyes. "In the way of Thy judgments have we waited for Thee, O Lord; the desire of our soul has been to Thy name and to the remembrance

of Thee." This is the Advent attitude which if we assume to our very best—poor as that best may be—with the strongest convictions of our minds, wavering and weak as they may be, and the warmest feelings of our hearts, faint and feeble as their glow may be, the full perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, in which alone we trust, will certainly not be found to fail our humble expectations.

*The Prayer.**

O ALMIGHTY God, Who art the Judge of all the world, "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" in Thy Son Jesus Christ, Who lovest not that a sinner should perish, but delightest in his conversion and salvation, be Thou pleased to work in us what Thou hast commanded should be in us. We have neither brought forth fruit unto Thee

* J. Taylor's "Holy Dying."

and unto holiness, nor have wept out penitential tears, but have behaved ourselves like one who is unconcerned in the ruins and breaches of his soul. Lord, give us the grace of that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation. Soften our hearts with the warmth of Thy love and refresh them with dew from above. Make us prudent and careful in our souls, strong and resolute in righteous will and conduct, watchful against our spiritual enemies, patient under trials, severe in our hatred of all sin. Lord, we deserve it not but we pray hopefully for Thy forgiveness and for the blessings which Thou hast in store for those whom Thou wilt own in the Great Day. Religion our employment, service to others our recreation, and patience our rest, may we so live to Christ that to die shall be gain through His eternal Redemption. Amen.

The Advent Expectation.

JESUS, promised as "the root and offspring of David," and appearing as "the bright and morning star," gives the further promise, "Surely I come quickly," to which the disciple whom He loved responds, "Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus."

How many of us there are who have no such "Amen" to return to that same assurance which the Church is now echoing to them every day, disciples though they too are whom Jesus loves, though not perhaps so fondly, because not so deservedly, as He loved John. With some of us the "Amen" finds no utterance because they do not believe with any sincerity that the announcement means what it says; with others

because they have no desire for its fulfilment. There are who disbelieving or even scoffing say, inwardly the one and outwardly the other, "Where is the promise of His coming? for all things continue as they were two thousand years ago when the promise was made;" or else with a mixture of trembling belief and scornful defiance, "Let us alone: what have we to do with Thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Wilt Thou come first to torment and then to destroy us?"

The truly loving disciple awaits, expects, and longs for Him, and does so, it may be, now and then, when the trial of his faith presses hard upon him, with a feeling which though impatient is not unholy. The cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true"—that of the souls of martyrs in Hades—is joined in here on earth by not a few who, assured that "after their earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved they have a building

of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," are earnestly desiring "to depart and to be with Christ" in that blessed and glorious abode. As S. Peter puts it, their fondest hopes hasten to this home of refuge and rest. Their expectation of it is "earnest," as S. Paul describes it. Let us consider what our own condition is as regards feelings of the like kind. To do so will, at least, supply us with a measure of our spiritual deficiency. It will afford us much assistance in learning how much need we have of God's grace and therefore what to do and to undo towards obtaining that indispensable gift.

It is very common—and rightly so—to give to the Lord's Second Coming a more distinct and individual concern than is easy when we confine the idea of it to the universal Judgment. This is done by showing that, for practical effect the prospect of death, which admits of no

important uncertainty, may be made to answer the same purpose. "It is appointed unto us once to die"—no one disputes or doubts that—"and after death the judgment." Not that there is no state of our soul between death and judgment, but whatever such state may be, there remains in it no more place for repentance, but only a certain looking for of the last account, without any prospect of its result, for weal or for woe, being changed from what was determined when the bodily life came to an end.

The lessons which this fact should teach us are important beyond measure, and they are always in season. The twofold character of Advent directs our thoughts beyond them. The coming for which we are permitted to look will be a glorious one, and the fit subject for a hope than which none can be more blessed; but we shall do well to ask ourselves the question whether

there may not be danger in our way of taking this brighter view of it.

In the case of the Jews, was it not because they dwelt entirely upon that aspect, in other words because they looked only to the second Advent, and entirely lost sight of what the first would be, that they brought upon themselves the condemnation which is implied in the words, "He came unto His own, and his own received Him not." The great obligation of those concerning whom they were spoken was to study and understand them as spoken by the Lord their God. They tell of prophecies fulfilled in spite of the warnings which should have been taken from them. "He is despised and rejected; a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not." Ashamed of Him at His first coming, they brought

it on themselves to be "ashamed before" Him at His second.

Although we may not be influenced by any Jewish craving for such glory, power and splendour as are of this world only, we may be by something too much like it in desiring to see the Second Advent. Visions of the restoration of the chosen people to their own land, of a thousand years of Messiah's reigning upon earth, the millennium of universal peace, no more competition among nations in raising armies and building navies—the complete fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of the earth being "filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea," may stir the heart and affect the imagination in a way entirely adverse to our having in us the mind which was in Him Who "took upon Him the form of a servant," and, being infinitely "better than the angels," was born "in the likeness of men," and "found in

fashion as a man," Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter, the son of Joseph and Mary. If it were for the first Advent such as we know it to have been, so humble, so obscure, so despised, so persecuted, and, humanly speaking, so helpless; where, in that case, would have been our prayer of "Come, Lord Jesus"—what its sincerity and the interest of our expectation? To exclaim, "Come, Lord Jesus, that we may reign with Thee in power and great glory, some of us, or of those we love best, to sit with Thee on thrones judging with Thee, not the tribes of Israel but all mankind; come that we may witness the deliverance of all creation from every evil; that we may be canopied by the new heavens and tread the new earth of which Thy righteousness shall have taken possession for ever; that we may behold the New Jerusalem descending from God out of Heaven, prepared for Christ as a

bride adorned for her husband"—this is one thing.

But is it not quite another to exclaim, "Come, Lord Jesus, in the likeness of sinful flesh, to be as a root out of a dry ground ; having no form nor comeliness to attract the carnal admiration ; to be rejected by human wisdom ; trampled on by human power ; put to death by human malice—come, and having come, bid us to follow Thee ; to be with Thee in a lowly and sorely-tried life ; to share Thy agony and bloody sweat ; Thy Cross and passion ; Thy death and burial : or, if spared from sharing them, at least to believe in Thee and trust Thee, to honour and glorify Thee in spite of them, nay because of them" ?

From holy souls invitations of both these kinds may proceed, but it is well to understand and feel that, as for Christ Himself the way to that second Advent lay only through this first, so

in ours there can be no sincerity, and therefore no advantage in crying, "Come" with reference to His eternal and glorious kingdom, unless we have first invited, brought hither, and welcomed Him to sanctify and guide the humble course of our every-day life.

- *The Prayer.*

O HOLY Jesus, Who hast overcome death and triumphed over all the other powers of darkness, make us to triumph with Thee, rising from the death of sin and living the new life of grace. In Thee and Thee only do we trust. Thou art our hope and our desire, the support of our faith, the source of our joy and the strength of our confidence. Our souls are in Thy hands, do Thou support and guide them. Forgive their sins and remedy their sinfulness and pity their infirmities; and when Thou shalt reveal Thy great day, show

to us all the mercies, and work upon us and within us the complete effects, of Thy advocacy, Thy intercession, Thy mediation and Thy redemption. Thou shalt answer for us, O Lord our God. Thou art just, Thou art merciful, Thou art compassionate, and Thou art slow to anger and plenteous in goodness. Let not what Thou hast done and what Thou hast suffered for us be made of none effect by ourselves and our enemies, but make us capable of Thy mercies and certain to receive them. We are Thine, Holy Jesus, O save us. O dwell with us here while we live on earth, that we may dwell with Thee in the eternal glories of God—Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

The Advent Invitation.

SEARCHING the Scriptures we find more stress laid upon preparation for Christ's Second Coming, than upon that for our death. Our idea of death is that of a complete severance from our present state of being. We regard it as "a great gulf fixed" between totally different worlds—a Lethe or forgetfulness into which we shall sink, and rising again to its surface shall find ourselves completely changed by it, so that the person who stands on the opposite shore will be quite another than he ever was on the side he fell in from.

The consequence of this notion is that one is, here, in oneself and towards others, not felt to have anything to

do with the region which lies beyond the grave. Some perhaps who know and feel that as they are now they could not live in heaven, may imagine that amid new scenes, surrounded by new companions and objects, out of reach of temptation, and released from the bondage of a corrupt nature, they would find themselves (so to say) completely at home amongst "saints and angels and the spirits of just men made perfect." It would be no more difficult to effect the change than it is to wash off stains in a bath or a hand basin. "It is circumstances," say they, "which make people what they are, and they will do it against wishes, against conscience, and in spite of endeavours to amend. Like chameleons, we take our colour from our surroundings, which for the most part are not of our own choosing."

So may some flatter themselves, and to correct the fatal mistake we are

called upon by God's Word to be ever in readiness for an event of which this lower world will be the scene—which is to come upon it as a thief in the night, and while its inhabitants are occupied just as they were yesterday and the day before and would be on the morrow, but for the awful interruption. What we are bidden to stand always prepared for is, not first of all our being taken out of the world that we may go to Christ, but Christ's coming into the world and appearing in our very midst. The question we have to put to ourselves is not so much whether we have “a desire to depart and to be with Christ,” as whether we are on the watch to open the door of our earthly house, and to receive and welcome Christ whensoever He stands at its door and knocks in His own person.

Let us then reflect that if we ourselves desired to form a correct and complete opinion of the character and

life of some one, we should not be satisfied to take him as he would be likely to present himself before us if summoned to our house, but should rather take him by a sort of surprise, not rude or unreasonable, in his own abode. And so it is that Christ warns us that He will take us. In those places, and amidst those doings with which Christ, or let us say our religion, has, or seems to have, the least concern—when He has not appointed to meet us as He does in His house of prayer or at His holy table—there and then, if we are so engaged that we shall not have cause to tremble or even so much as to blush with shame before Him, it will be well with us.

Another thing to be borne in mind is that it is not death alone, uncertain with respect to its time as that is, which has to be taken account of as demanding such preparedness. It seems impossible to doubt that the sin

of the sinner may at length become so exceeding sinful as to provoke the closing of his last account while yet he is healthy and strong in body, and has before him a term, shorter or longer, of unexhausted vitality.

Great confidence and even great boldness are implied in ability to cry, "Come, Lord Jesus" sincerely and with a full sense of its meaning: but not greater than can be inspired by a firm faith in the blood of the Cross, and in the promised help of the Holy Spirit for overcoming hindrances and infirmities in our strivings after that faith. If any one imagines that he can venture to say "Come, Lord Jesus" in the way of a challenge—as calling for and defying a close examination of his life and heart, and assured that the results of that examination will be his justification before God, such an one does indeed deceive himself. He challenges only to his own condemnation. The

complacent profession which is only too often heard from dying lips—"I have never done any harm to any one"—is sometimes too near to such a challenge. No greater harm can be done to one's neighbour than to set him an example, or in any way influence him, in failing to do his duty to his God.

But the notion of having "nothing serious to answer for" when Christ comes for Judgment may be founded upon a vague sort of idea that by concealment, by cleverness, by excuses, or even by vehement and tearful appeals for mercy when we stand before the very throne and meet the Lord face to face, it will be possible to baffle, to evade or to divert the sentence which we cannot but be fully conscious of having deserved. This, too, is a deadly delusion, from which the eyes will be opened only to "behold and wonder and perish." Concealment there can be none under the piercing

light of the Sun of righteousness shining in a cloudless sky. Defence there can be none, for man's defence would be the condemnation of Him Who demanded no less a sacrifice and satisfaction for sins than the death of His only begotten Son. Justification there can be none of the kind which is presumed upon—for against that every mouth is stopped and all the world, even the world of the most godly as measured by their own merits, is “guilty before God.” And if there be any expressions of penitence they will be too late. Forgiveness must be sought and granted in anticipation of the great Assize, although it may not be known to have been granted until the blessed announcement of it is made once and for ever, and the soul is set free to “go and sin no more.”

For life, for light, for rest, for refreshment, for succour, for shelter, for safety, or whatever else we need in our

spiritual course, it is to Christ we have to look for it, and not merely to look, but, as He Himself so repeatedly bids us, to come for it. Our religion must not be a state of mere expectation—mere sitting still and waiting for the signs and tokens of our Saviour's promised approaches—the final one or those that are intermediate. The Church's cry to us at this season and at all seasons is, "Go ye out to meet Him." The idea of waiting indoors for His knocking—that of the sufficiency of an inactive, backward, and wholly meditative sort of religion, though it may seem to be encouraged by Mary's choice as more approved by her Lord than Martha's, was not due to sitting down until Jesus came, but to doing so at His very feet, and drinking in His gracious words when He had come. When we do not clearly see our opportunities of acting in ways which we know would be

pleasing to God, we must seek after them with diligence and perseverance if we would find the infinite good which will never be taken away from us.

The Prayer.

O BLESSED Jesus, Thou hast used many arts to save us ; Thou hast given Thy life to redeem us, Thy Holy Spirit to sanctify us, Thyself for our example, Thy Word for our rule, Thy grace for our guide, Thy body on the Cross for the sin of our souls ; and after all this Thou hast given us a Church, and for the work of its ministry some to be "apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers," to call us, to attract us, to constrain us to holiness, and peace and happiness. If we cry unto Thee "O now come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," grant that it may be with a heart deeply and sincerely desirous of Thy

presence, hungering for the knowledge of Thee and thirsting for Thy grace, so that we may receive Thee, not as a guest that tarrieth but a day, or as a stranger whom we cannot recognize, but as an inhabitant, the Lord of all our faculties. Enter in and take full possession and dwell with us for ever; that we also may dwell in the heart of our dearest Lord, which was opened for us with the spear of His enemies as well as with the yearnings of His love. Amen.

Certainty of Salvation.

WHEN the holy Jesus took account of the first mission and journeying of His apostles, He found them rejoicing in privileges and outward powers—in their authority over the unclean spirits which possessed other men. Weighing this in His own balance He found the cause too light, and therefore diverted it to the right object—"Rejoice that your names are written in Heaven."

The election of holy persons is a condition allied to duty, absolute and infallible in the general, and supposing all the dispositions and requisites to concur, but fallible in the particular, if we fall off from the mercies of the covenant, and by quibbling evade its terms. The conclusion from which is

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WHEN the holy Jesus took account of the first mission and journeying of His apostles, He found them rejoicing in privileges and outward powers—in their authority over the unclean spirits which possessed other men. Weighing this in His own balance He found the cause too light, and therefore diverted it to the right object—"Rejoice that your names are written in Heaven."

The election of holy persons is a condition allied to duty, absolute and infallible in the general, and supposing all the dispositions and requisites to concur, but fallible in the particular, if we fall off from the mercies of the covenant, and by quibbling evade its terms. The conclusion from which is

thereupon with reverence ; for it is not needful for thee to see with thine eyes the things that are in secret." Whatsoever, indeed, God hath revealed in general concerning election concerns all persons within the pale of Christianity. He hath conveyed notice to all Christian people that they are the sons of God, that they are the heirs of eternity, "coheirs with Christ," partakers of the Divine nature ; meaning that such they are by His design, and the purposes of the incarnation of His Son. But His peremptory, final, unalterable decree He keeps in the cabinets of the eternal ages, never to be unlocked until that day when the angel of the covenant shall declare the irrevocable, universal sentence.

And it is observable that all the confidences which the Spirit of God hath created in the elect are built upon duty, and stand or fall according to the weakness or strength of such

supporters. "We know that we are translated from death unto life, by our love unto the brethren;" meaning that the performance of our duty is the best consignment to eternity, and the only testimony that God gives us of our election other than that which we have received of Him in our baptism, at our first coming to Christ. Then did He "redeem us from our vain conversation," make us become His sons, justify us freely by His grace, purify us by faith, admit us into covenant with Christ to live according to His laws. But it is too certain that this assurance remains not long with all or many of us. We commonly throw dirt into our waters of baptism and stain the white robe which we then put on in exchange for that which was thrown off on the bank of Jordan.

We may all hope that God makes allowances and abatements for our infirmities, but of this we have few

rules to take our measure, and those few are not infallible in themselves, and we are yet more fallible in their application. We cannot tell whether we have not mingled some minutes of wickedness in the body of infirmities, and how much will bear excuse; in what time and to what persons, and to what degrees and upon what endeavours we shall be pardoned; so that all the interval between our losing baptismal grace and the day of our death we walk in a cloud of uncertainty and it may be of self-deception.

But there is a great variety of persons, and difference of degrees, and every step of returning to God may reasonably add one degree of hope, till at last it comes to its fullest possible assurance. Though many men presume themselves to be in the state of grace and are not; many being in the state of grace, are fearful that they are out of it, and many that are in God's

favour do think they are so and are not deceived.

All these cases say that to be certainly persuaded of our present salvation is not a duty : sometimes it is not possible, and sometimes it is better to be otherwise. But if we consider of this certainty as a blessing and a reward, there is no question but in a great and extraordinary sanctity of life there may be also a great confidence and fulness of persuasion that our present being is well and gracious, and then it is certain that such persons are not deceived. But the certainty is reasonable in none but long-proved Christians, habitually holy persons ; not in new converts, or lately lapsed people. Concerning them we find the Spirit of God speaking with words of restraint and ambiguity ; a “ perhaps ” and a “ who knoweth ” and “ peradventure the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee.” God may have mercy ; that He hath done

so they only have reason to be confident whom He hath blessed with a lasting, continuing piety, and who have torn up every "root of bitterness" that might "spring up and trouble them."

When confidence outruns our growth in grace, it is itself a sin, though when confidence is equal with the grace it is of itself no regular and universal duty, but a blessing and a reward, indulged by special dispensation, and in order to special necessities or particular purposes. Only so much hope is simply necessary as excludes despair and encourages duty, and glorifies God and welcomes His mercy. But that hope should be without fear is not given but to the highest faith and the most excellent charity, and to habitual, ratified and confessed Christians, and to them with some variety.

The sum is this : All that are in the state of beginning and imperfection have a conditional certainty, changeable

and fallible in respect of us (for we meddle not with what it is in God's secret purposes), changeable, I say, as their wills and resolutions. They that have grown towards perfection have more reason to be confident, and many times are so; but still, although the strength of the habits of grace adds degrees of moral certainty to their expectation, yet it is but as their condition is hopeful and promising, and to be morally determined. But to those few to whom God hath given confirmation in grace, He hath also given a certainty as to condition, and if that be revealed to them their persuasion is infallible. If it be not revealed to them, their condition is in itself not so, but in the highest kind of hope, an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.

To the multitude of believers the cloud gives light on one side, and is dark on the other; and sometimes a

bright ray peeps through the fringes of a shower and immediately hides itself; bidding us be humble and diligent, striving forwards, and looking upwards; endeavouring our duty, and longing after Heaven.

The Prayer.

O ETERNAL God, Whose counsels are in the great deep, and Thy ways past finding out, Thou hast built our faith upon Thy promises, our hopes upon Thy goodness, and our charity upon Thy life in our flesh. We acknowledge that all our true blessings are from Thee, and to ourselves we owe all our shame, and confusions, and causes for fearing death. Give us the assistance of the Holy Ghost to help us in our duties, to enliven our prospects, to alleviate our sorrows, to refresh our spirits, and to direct our endeavours to righteousness and true holiness.

Lead us, dearest Lord, from grace to grace, from weakness to strength, from acts to habits, from habits to constancy, that we may also pass into the regions of assurance, receiving the earnest of the Spirit, and the adoption of sons. So may we be consigned to a happy immortality, and enter into the possession of the inheritance which we are invited to expect in the kingdom of Thy Son Jesus. Amen.

THE END.

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